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AUTHOR Harrison, Ina Sue
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ABSTRACT

This practicum was designed to improve communication practices among teachers and between teachers and parents in an elementary school. An emphasis was placed on utilizing the writing skills of students to link teachers and parents through a communication partnership. The partnership was accomplished through the expansion of the student reading club, leading to the development of a student newspaper, homework projects to encourage home-school interaction, and other activities. The student newspaper was designed to link teachers, parents, and students and provide a source of information about school events and activities for all three groups. Teachers were also encouraged to write and telephone parents to improve communication and parents participation. As a result of the planned interventions, communication among and between teachers, parents, and students increased. School records and surveys indicated that teachers had fewer grievances and parents were more informed about and involved in school activities. Six appendixes provide copies of parent and teacher surveys, reading club contracts, home-school projects, and student writing activities. (Contains 33 references.) (MDM)

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Improving the Communication Practices of an Elementary School by Establishing a Partnership Between Home and School

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A Practicum II Report Presented to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

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PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

This practicum took place as described.

Joy Hooper

Principal, Elementary School
Title

Winder, Georgia

August 2, 1995
Date

This practicum report was submitted by Ina Sue Harrison under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed. D. Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

Approved:

7 August 1995
Date of Final Approval of Report

Roberta Wong Bouverat
Roberta Wong Bouverat, Ph. D.
Adviser

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ABSTRACT

Improving the Communication Practices of an Elementary School by Establishing a Partnership Between Home and School. Harrison, Ina S., 1995: Practicum Report, Nova Southeastern University, Ed. D. Program in Child and Youth Studies. Interactive communication/ homework/student role/language arts/teacher collaboration.

This practicum was designed to improve existing communication practices in an elementary school, establish additional avenues of communication, and encourage teacher collaboration in planning. The goal was to promote interactive communication among teachers and between parents and teachers.

An emphasis was placed on utilizing the writing skills of children to link teachers and parents through a communication partnership. Interview sheets guided students' in collecting news about curriculum, school events, or recognition. Homework writing projects were designed to collect stories for a school paper written and published by students. A reading club involved parents in helping with the literacy efforts of the school.

As a result of the practicum, communication was improved. Both parents and teachers benefited from reading the students' monthly newspaper and interacting through homework writing projects. Teachers collaborated about writing themes and shared students' writing. Parental attendance in school meetings also increased.

* * * * * *

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Community

The writer's community was located in a rural area in the southeast United States. The small county surrounded by rolling hills and a lush green countryside was rich in architectural heritage. Many buildings were on the National Register of Historic Places, and one of the remaining fifteen covered bridges in the state was located in this small community. Another historical site was a fort constructed in 1792 for protection from the Creek and Cherokee Indians.

Agribusiness played a major role in the county's economy. The 421 farms once producing cotton and other row crops were now grazing land for cows or beef cattle. Many other farmers raised poultry for one of the local processing plants. Industry in the county consisted of several clothing manufacturers, a chemical plant, a fiberglass plant, and a large winery. These were the primary employers of the local families. A community hospital drew many

medical professionals to the area, but the school system was the largest employer of professionals. Seven elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school employed approximately 700 teachers.

The writer's school, established in 1932, had a long successful history of community support. The original facility was built through the cooperative efforts of local citizens. The people of the community cut down trees, cleared the land, and actually helped build the first schoolhouse and gym. The structure remained unchanged for years.

In 1979, the school, due to the condition of the building, was in danger of being closed by the county administrators. As a result of pressure from the community, the school district was rezoned to increase the school population rather than close the school. Then funds were made available through a bond referendum to rebuild the school. One section at a time of the building was replaced by a new and much larger facility; the school was never closed during the construction. Two years after construction was completed, the school was bursting at the seams because the area continued to grow. With the growth of the school, some of the community spirit was lost. The student body was now more transitional than it once was, and work patterns also changed. There were now more single-

parent families and families with both parents working. The writer's school, the largest elementary school in the county system, had a population of 625 students with a ratio of 80% white and 20% non-white. The socioeconomic range of the students' families varied from professional families to those below the poverty level.

Writer's Work Setting and Role

The school population targeted by the writer, a remedial education teacher, was two 3rd-grade classes and four 4th-grade classes. The 4th-grade classes received remediation through an in-class Remedial Education Program (REP), a state funded program. The 3rd-grade classes received remediation through the Special Instructional Assistance (SIA), another state funded program. These students were identified by a standardized test as needing assistance in reading, math, or both. The writer teamed with six regular classroom teachers to make the educational day more meaningful for all students. An in-class model was used for assisting approximately 107 students.

The writer was born in the county and lived there until graduating from high school. An undergraduate degree in home economics was earned by the writer from a university on the west coast. The writer earned a master's degree in elementary and middle school education in the southeast and is also certificated to

teach gifted students.

The writer had 15 years of teaching experience--the first ten years as a 4th-grade teacher and the last five years as a remedial education teacher. All 15 years of experience were in the same school.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

The problem identified for improvement was inadequate communication practices among teachers and between parents/teachers. Parents were often not informed of school happenings and felt left out of the educational process. Teachers within a particular grade level had no glimpse into what other teachers or students were doing. Teachers experienced poor communication within the educational community as well as from home to school and school to home.

Problem Documentation

The problem of inadequate communication revealed itself in several ways:

1. At three of the nine leadership team meetings, grade level chairpersons discussed the poor written and verbal communication among teachers within the school.

2. Records showed that of the six parental meetings required by the Student Instructional Assistance Program for 3rd grade only 4 targeted parents out of 32 families attended the first meeting, 3 attended the second, and 9 attended the third, with no numbers recorded for the other three meetings.
3. Fourteen of the 30 parents interviewed reported either negative communication or no communication with teachers during the 1993-94 school year.
4. Thirteen of the 30 parents interviewed complained of not being informed of school happenings or events.

Causative Analysis

The causes of the problem of ineffective communication took many shapes. Teachers were isolated from peers most of the teaching day and had very few if any avenues open for professional sharing. Teachers did not have mutual planning times which meant the only time for planning together was after school. Since planning collaboratively was so difficult, few teachers planned or participated in long-term activities that encouraged teamwork.

Parental involvement meetings were required in the guidelines for state funded SIA programs. These meetings were poorly attended by the targeted parents. The parents who attended these

meetings were the parents of students not experiencing academic problems. These parents were already supportive of the school and the school programs.

Notes sent home by students about activities or events sponsored by the school were frequently lost which led to parents feeling ill informed or left out. When costumes were required for plays or materials were needed for science projects, parents were often not informed until the events were under way, or over.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

A study of the literature supported the need for improved communication in schools and suggested other causes for inadequate communication. Few avenues for professional sharing of ideas were built into the curriculum of schools due to teachers' isolation from peers. Teachers were portrayed as being the only professional group who practiced their profession in almost total isolation from others with the same tasks. Barth (1990) made the analogy of teachers at work to children participating in parallel play. With such work schedules, teachers averted those who might help them do things better, and thus continued to reinvent the wheel rather than benefit from other teachers' experiences. Routman (1991) suggested that teachers often feel self-conscious about spotlighting themselves and assume that other teachers already do the same things. School

professionals have continued to require direction to develop and use the knowledge and skills needed for effective professional collaboration (Friend & Cook, 1992).

Parents, on the other hand, had been increasingly viewed as vital ingredients in the successful literacy development of children (Rasinski & Fredericks, 1989). Two-way communication between teachers and parents was considered crucial to students who had experienced problems in school. However, teachers had seldom given parents ideas and strategies to use as sources of encouragement when children experienced academic problems or required help with schoolwork. With a deficiency in communication, the total responsibility of education reverted back to the teacher, and the educational efforts were cut in half. Parents and teachers who had failed to present a united front to students automatically conveyed the idea that school was unimportant.

From the point of view of parents, teachers had sometimes appeared to be insensitive to the needs of individual children, failed to respect parents' knowledge of their own children, and created obstacles to communication by making themselves relatively unavailable (Seifert, 1992). Teachers who had given such an impression to parents had closed the door to future communication.

Teachers had often times been puzzled by, or lost in a myriad

of parental involvement suggestions in professional journals. Teachers knew that strong parent involvement was not a question of "Should we?" but rather a question of "How should we?" (Routman, 1991); just where and how to start was the question asked by many teachers.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

The following goals and outcomes were projected for this practicum. Communication is considered vital to the life of any organization but especially to a learning environment. Communication among teachers is important as well as communication between teachers/parents and parents/teachers. The goal of this practicum is to promote interactive communication among teachers and between parents/teachers in order to meet students' needs and build academic success.

Expected Outcomes

Four outcomes were expected from this practicum. The writer expected better communication across grade levels, improved attendance at parental meetings, more positive communication to parents, and better informed parents.

Measurement of Outcomes

The following objectives were developed by the writer to measure the outcomes of the practicum:

1. No grievances will be brought up in leadership team meetings about communication across grade levels in regard to curriculum or activities of other teachers.
2. Records of the Student Instructional Assistance meetings during the 1994-95 school year will indicate at least 12 targeted parents in attendance at the first three meetings.
3. On a written survey, 19 out of 30 parents will answer positively when questioned about communication practices with teachers during 1994-95 academic year.
4. When surveyed, 18 out of 30 parents will say that school events were well publicized.

The writer used various information in conjunction with the objectives to analyze the outcomes of the practicum. School records were checked as well as notes kept by the writer during the implementation. All pertinent happening as well as interesting anecdotal information was considered. Parents', teachers' and students' comments played an important role in reaching final conclusions about the project's effectiveness.

The writer checked the minutes of leadership team meetings to make certain that no grievances had been brought up in regard to insufficient communication practices across grade levels. The absence of grievances, according to the writer's perspective, was an indication of satisfaction in regard to curriculum communication or the communication of other school related information.

Records from each SIA meeting were checked for SIA parent participation with twelve or more parents in attendance indicating success. The writer looked for common attributes in the better attended meetings to determine what made these meetings more appealing to parents. Then these qualities were duplicated in future meetings.

From the written survey (see Appendix A), the writer looked for yes answers to the first two questions which indicated positive communication practices by teachers. If teachers initiated communication and were pleasant and informative, the objective for more positive communication was considered successful. The writer felt strongly that all parents should indicate the receipt of some form of communication from the teacher.

The writer read the explanations from the comment section of the parental survey to analyze the information given and evaluate

the success of the intervention conducted. Comments included on the interactive homework projects were also taken into account.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Possible Solutions

The following suggestions were gleaned from literature to spark positive communication practices within a school and between home and school where communication practices were inadequate. Cooperation and collaboration are needed within a school, and Slavin (1987) suggested that teachers be given time to plan goals and strategies, to prepare common libraries of instructional materials, and to make decisions about cooperative activities. These comments were echoed by Tewel (1991) who said that teachers must have an opportunity to meet regularly to share ideas, trade theories, reinforce each other, test beliefs, and share knowledge. Teachers who interacted collaboratively maximized all participants' strengths, minimized weaknesses, and strengthened the results for all (Friend & Cook, 1992). Collaboration, as used by the writer, was defined by Friend and Cook as a style for direct interaction between

at least two coequal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making toward a common goal. These collaborative practices gave teachers a feeling of being a part of an educational community, for until teachers felt a part of the educational community and incorporated the belief that a child's success was everyone's responsibility, sharing and communicating successfully with parents was difficult.

Epstein (1992) suggested that parents and teachers who worked in partnership sent common messages to students about the importance of school. Many parents volunteered and helped at school, but research by Epstein showed that single and working parents were less likely to interact with the school. These parents were more likely to assist children at home with school activities. Therefore, teachers should take leadership roles to encourage and guide parental participation through clear communication. As Potter (1989) suggested, there are several dimensions of parental involvement: monitoring, informing, and participating. Under the guidance of the classroom teacher, parents were made to feel like members of the classroom community. Schools have moved from telling parents that involvement was important to showing and guiding in specific and appropriate ways such as developing channels for clear and accessible written and verbal communication (Epstein,

1988). The most overwhelming requests that parents have made to schools were for open communication and for as much information as possible (Jowett & Baginsky, 1991).

Parents have continually expressed the need for direct communication about attendance, behavior, academic progress, homework, and curriculum. Such requests highlighted research findings that teachers were the key advisors on how time was spent at home. Bjorklund and Burger (1987) stated that both parents and teachers possessed valuable information about children's abilities, interests, likes, dislikes, and needs. When this information was shared in a positive manner, children were strengthened.

Bjorklund and Burger (1987) said that teachers should lessen parents' tension by making parents feel relaxed, comfortable, and wanted upon entering the school door. Also, since school was the teachers' territory, communication with the parents should be without educational jargon; the focus of the communication should be positive; and suggestions for helping children at home should be provided to the parents. Giles (1993) emphasized that neglect was crippling to children whether the neglect was due to poverty or wealth. Neglect due to poverty was usually a result of lack of educational skill or know how. Neglect due to wealth was characterized by lack of time spent with the children. Epstein

(1991) suggested that teachers were in the position to offer ideas for parents to use in order to stimulate and encourage children's learning, and that all parents must be convinced that parents have something worthwhile to share.

Gainey (1993) stated that Together Everyone Achieves More (TEAM), and this TEAM acronym.seemed apropos to a parent/teacher partnership. As a result of such an approach, parent involvement improved student achievement, attitudes, homework, report card grades, and aspirations likewise improved. Parents and teachers presented themselves to the student as a team united in the common goal of educating the student. Epstein & Salinas (1992), said that children who see parents and teachers communicate become more aware of the benefit of talking to someone at home about schoolwork and school decisions.

The question most often asked by parents was: "How can I help my child at home?" Epstein & Salinas (1992) answered this question by offering homework projects in which all children, not just those with motivated parents, gained the benefits of parent interaction. Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS), provided structured activities so parents could see what children were doing in school, discussed projects with them, and provided help if needed. These projects kept parents tuned in to school

activities and opened lines of communication to school. Bobango (1994) agreed that teachers should give parents tips to help children succeed. Parents did not have to know the material. Looking at homework, signing or initialing, and giving a comment about neatness conveyed to the student that the school and home were working together.

Seifert (1992) responded to the recent demographic changes in families that limited parental involvement by suggesting that educators find ways to support parents' care and concern, even when parents cannot show it through physical presence. Technology, such as radio, television, video- and audiotapes, computers, and other electronic connections between home and school, have improved many types of involvement (Epstein, 1991).

The following were suggestions for involving other parents: Skits and plays could be presented during parent-school meetings (Wiesendanger, 1993); teachers and parents could develop tip sheets or newsletters to provide information about how parents could help students succeed (Bobango, 1994); and students could assume the role of a news crew and create a news script presenting school related announcements (Jordahl, 1992).

Description of Selected Solution

After reviewing the literature and contemplating ways to

improve communication, the writer decided to expand the reading club organized during the 1993-94 school year; start a school newspaper; write encouraging notes and letters and phone parents; design homework projects to encourage home/school interaction; and involve students in programs to boost parental participation in school events. These methods incorporated both individual and group communication practices geared toward encouraging greater interaction among teachers and between parents and teachers.

The reading club was the catalyst from which many of the other activities evolved. The club theme was an incentive program suggested by Carwile and Parker (1990) to remove the stigma of receiving remedial help in reading; however, the writer used the idea with all students since the school remedial program was not a pull-out program. The writer tried to involve as many students as possible in the club. Membership in the reading club was an incentive for students to read, and many of the follow-up activities planned for students were performance based in order to draw parents to the school for the performances. Some of the performances were taped for parents to view at home. To become a member of the reading club, the student and a parent or guardian had to sign a contract to read twenty-minutes-a-day (see Appendix B). The contract was a connection between home and school for students

and parents to work together.

The activity to improve communication among teachers was the school newspaper. A sharing box was displayed in the workroom for teachers to place students' work for publication. The newspaper served as a source of information to tear down the wall of isolation and reveal what teachers were doing. Student reporters solicited information about teachers for the school paper using an information retrieval sheet (see Appendix C), compiled the information, and often highlighted teachers in the articles that the students wrote. Information on curriculum, field trips, guest presenters, and special activities were also reported in the paper, and an information format (see Appendix D) was used for collecting and organizing this news.

The newspaper served to improve the communication between teachers and parents. The writer kept the parents, as well as the teachers, up to date on school news. To involve parents in the school publication, the writer designed writing themes as homework projects that parents and students could complete together. Taggart (1994) described an autobiographical writing project used with high school students that was very helpful in planning as well as those suggested by Holzberg (1994). Planning for the writing projects was a cooperative effort between the writer and the 4th-grade teachers.

The writing projects utilized parental response forms (see Appendix E) similar to those used by Epstein and Salinas (1992) to further the parent/teacher communication. Every month the collaboratively planned projects were reflected in articles written and published in the school newspaper by 4th-grade students. These kinds of activities placed the child in the center of the family school connection, for too often students are the forgotten members of family school partnerships (Davies, 1991; Epstein, 1988; Swap,1990).

Another mode of communication used was personal letters, cards, and phone calls. Personalized notes that addressed concerns were suggested by Morgan (1989) to foster a warm parent/teacher relationship, and Gurcsik (1992) agreed that writing home regularly was a way to improve communication with parents. This mode of communication was utilized through cards entitled "Good News." The cards were only used for sending positive messages to parents. Letters were sent home calling for conferences if students were having academic problems. In such cases, the remedial teacher along with the classroom teacher met together with the parents to make recommendations.

The writer was also concerned with meeting students' needs and keeping students involved. Many communication activities in

which students participated were intrinsically motivational in context: the club, the newspaper, and news broadcast. Tangible rewards were not included because of findings by Cameron and Pierce (1994) that tangible rewards have a somewhat negative effect on intrinsic motivation.

Report of Action Taken

Since the purpose of the practicum was to improve communication, the writer started by compiling a list of students' addresses with the parents' names and phone numbers. Then, the writer mailed about eight notes a week until all parents were notified at least once. Each note included a positive remark about the student, a comment about enjoying working with the student, or something of interest from school.

The writer, anticipating publishing a school newspaper, invited a reporter from the local newspaper office to conduct a workshop for the 4th-grade classes. The workshop prepared students to write for publication. The children were able to participate in the workshop by asking the reporter questions. A significant point made by the reporter was the importance of recounting events objectively rather than interjecting one's own opinion.

Letters encouraging students to join the reading club were distributed. Included with the letter was a contract that had to be

signed by both student and parent/guardian in order for the student to join the club. The club gave the students and parents an opportunity for sharing time together at home. Since there was no room large enough to hold all the participating members, the programs for the meetings were video taped and viewed in classrooms via the school television network system. In most cases two classes met together to watch the program. These meetings for the club members were held to keep the motivational momentum at a high ebb. The 3rd-grade club members were responsible for the broadcasts. Another teacher whose son was a member of the club helped with cue cards and gave other technical assistance.

To set the foundation for the monthly editions of the school newspaper, the writer talked with the faculty during an after school meeting. A sharing box was placed in the workroom for teachers to share students' stories or poems for inclusion in the paper. For collecting grade-level news, the writer developed a generic information format (see Appendix D) for students to deliver to teachers and arrange a time for collecting the information. Different 4th-grade students were assigned as reporters each month. The school paper had essentially two sections--the grade-level news and stories and poems written by students.

Home writing projects also started the first month. The

projects, which were a part of the language arts curriculum, required talking with parents to gain information for writing. Interview sheets (see Appendix E) were designed for students to use in guiding the conversation. The projects gave students a purpose for writing and served as a vehicle for encouraging communication from home to school. These monthly projects coincided with newspaper publications. Together the classroom teachers and the writer chose well written papers to be published in the school news. Students were assisted with rewriting and editing, allowing for all students on the various skill levels to be published at a future time.

Class books were compiled using the home writing projects. Everyone's stories could not be published in the school newspaper each month, so the class book was another avenue of publication. These books were displayed in the classrooms for parents to read when visiting for lunch or school meetings. Some were checked out by students for parents to read at home. Since the writing projects were cooperative efforts by students and parents, these stories gave some insight into family personalities. Sharing the books seemed to foster a closeness that drew class families together. One of the homework topics was to collect a favorite recipe and tell a story about why the food was special. These recipes and stories were spiral bound and given to mothers for Mother's Day. Finders and

Lewis (1994) stressed the importance of establishing a personal relationship with parents. Such activities as these were aimed at establishing such a relationship.

About mid year, the writer was eager to see how teachers were responding to the school newspaper; therefore, a questionnaire (see Appendix F) was developed to elicit information for improving the publications. The writer's desire was for teachers to feel that the paper was giving them a communication outlet. A few of the favorable comments made by teachers on the questionnaire were: "This is the first time I've known what's going on at the other grade levels. It's also been nice to see some of my former students' work!" "The paper has been a plus. It has given teachers the opportunity to share information with others--especially student's work." "It helps to know what the other classes and grades are doing."

Teachers made the following suggestions for improvement: "Have some younger students write short stories!" "Space is probably a limitation, but I would love to see more students' work published." "You may want to include a 'do at home activity suggestion' or perhaps suggest a book (book review section can be done by students) to read."

The emphasis for thirty-two weeks was communicating to

parents, teachers, and students in as many ways as possible. To encourage parents to visit the school, the writer gave ideas to students in a host teacher's class for writing plays. These ideas were actually story elements or settings. Then students were divided up into heterogeneous groups to develop the elements into plays. Students worked very hard and wrote wonderful plays. The plays were video taped and made available for parents to view at home. The best play was selected to be used in the monthly club broadcast.

Two other 4th-grade teachers planned with the writer to involve the students in performances, but these teachers used plays from a performance kit. After reading several plays and selecting four to produce, students practiced in groups until they were ready to perform. Invitations were mailed to parents, and 12 parents from a class of 20 students and 14 parents from a class of 21 attended the performances.

The county system reserved a day about mid year in the school calendar for teacher/parent conferences to foster more academic support at home for students experiencing problems; however, all parents were included. The parents of students not experiencing problems were invited to visit with the teacher and see what was going on at school. To encourage parents to attend, the writer called

parents (of 3rd and 4th grade students) who did not respond to the written invitations and gave them a personal invitation. This personal touch gave parents just enough encouragement to make the conference attendance gratifying to teachers and administrators.

The method the writer used to encourage increased participation in the SIA meetings was making personal phone calls and publishing the events in the school newspaper. Having a specified day to send news home also made the written communication methods more effective. To publicize some events, students used the computer to write the invitations to parents.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results

Four objectives were used to measure the outcomes of this practicum designed to improve the communication within an elementary school as well as school to home and home to school. The problem addressed was the inadequate communication practices among teachers and between parents and teachers. The writer was striving to make a home/school connection as well as to tear down the walls between teachers in the school. Efforts were made to encourage parental participation in school events; to relay helpful suggestions to parents as well as elicit comments from parents; to recognize achievements by students and teachers; to encourage more collaboration between teachers; and to keep everyone informed about the curriculum.

The first objective was that no grievances would be brought up in leadership team meetings in regard to communication across

grade levels. This objective was met, for no mention of grievances were found in the minutes of the leadership meetings. The writer was delighted by the teachers' responses and constructive suggestions made on the mid-year questionnaire and tried to incorporate these ideas into making communication better.

The second objective was for the records to indicate at least 12 targeted parents in attendance at three Student Instructional Assistance meetings. This goal was also met. Of the six meetings this year, 36 parents attended the first, 48 attended the second, 14 attended the third, 6 attended the fourth, 3 attended the fifth, and 17 attended the sixth. Only two of the six scheduled meetings this year had less than 12 parents; these two meeting were not designed for high attendance.

The third objective was that on a written survey 19 of 30 parents would answer with a yes about communication practices with teachers during the 1994-95 school year. This objective was met. Of the 27 parents who responded to the questionnaire 25 responded with yes answers to the questions about receiving notes and conversing with the teacher. Three parents never responded.

The fourth objective was that 18 parents out of 30 would say that the school events were well publicized. Twenty seven of the 30 parents responded and 26 had positive comments. The one parent

who responded in a negative way answered the question about whether the school news reports made parents feel more involved in the child's school with a, "No, I don't read it." Some of the more positive responses were: "Yes, the report gives me an opportunity to see what is happening in our school." "Yes, it helps to know what kind of work students do and how much the teachers help out the kids." "Yes, the newspaper lets parents know of events in each classroom." The other comments were very similar to these.

Discussion

The connection made with the home through clear communication has made a difference in the way teachers as well as parents feel about the school programs. The new principal, just starting a second year, had a desire to keep everyone involved and working as a team. The writer could compare the leadership style of the principal to a description by Donaldson (1993) that leadership is working smarter collectively by devoting time and energy to activities that demonstrated true benefit to children. The principal controlled, monitored, and directed but treated the school faculty and staff as a responsible community of adults. As a member of such a staff, the writer's goal to improve communication was indeed appropriate. Teachers responded well to working closer together and sharing ideas.

Teachers all across the grade levels agreed on a day to send notes, graded papers, and class newsletters to the parents. This day was also chosen by the writer to publish the monthly newspaper. Since parents knew when to expect news from school, the news was more apt to be received and read.

Too many times parent/teacher connections have seemed like a conspiracy to the students because of the way the partnership was addressed. However, the writer's emphasis had the students as the central focal point to give students, parents, and teachers the opportunity to share ideas. Through the homework writing projects, parents have been drawn into the school program. Three comments made by parents reflect this partnership or community feeling by parents. "The activities made me think of things I had forgotten about, and I got a chance to share my childhood with my child. It brought many laughs." "It is good to be a part of what is going on in school, and it helps me talk with my child about school." "We had fun working together. Such activities are good for children." Comments like these were returned with each writing project on the response section which gave the writer continual feedback.

The writing projects were sent home on the designated day, but the assignments were not due until the following week. Brandt (1989) suggested that the weekend was the best time for parents

and students to work together, and the writer found this suggestion to be well founded as time progressed.

Once the information was compiled the students looked forward to keying the stories into the computer. The computer also made editing less painful. The students' eagerness to write using the computer, supported findings that opportunities to work on computers have been consistently identified as highly motivating instructional activities (Reinking & Bridwell-Bowles, 1991).

An advantage of computer technology that has frequently been cited in literature is the computer's potential to create opportunities for students to engage in meaningful communicative experiences that frequently involve reading and writing (Bruce & Rubin, 1993; Reinking, 1986). Having students publish a school newspaper was such an opportunity and the writer's way of making a home/school connection. Most often if a child is involved in a school program, the parents will attend. Likewise, if students write and publish the newspaper, parents will read and respond. All the writings--from the classroom news to the story and poetry corner--were done by students. The writer was the "guide on the side" and editor.

The newspaper became less of a challenge to publish as time passed. Teachers were a little reserved at first about presenting

childrens' work. Each teacher seemed to think the writing had to be exceptional, but the emphasis made by the writer was to publish a variety of writing at all developmental levels. Near the end of the year, teachers began sharing more student stories with the writer to see if the stories could be used in the newspaper.

Parents often requested second copies of the newspaper to send to absent parents or other family members. Even with a financial crunch and paper shortage, the principal said that the paper required for publication would be made available.

Since the writer is a remedial teacher in language arts, the writer expected the newspaper project to stimulate students to write. However, the skill improvement in writing far exceeded prior expectations. Students who could write only a few lines at the beginning of the year were writing lengthy papers by the end of the year. These students required recognition to spur them on to better writing which the publications provided. However, there were many other components of the project such as technology and interaction with parents which could have played a role in improving writing skills.

Recommendations

As was stated earlier, communication was vital to the life of any organization but especially to a learning environment. The

writer recommended that to initiate communication improvement, first identify communication methods that were working, then recommend new communication methods where improvement was needed. All the approaches in this report were helpful in creating a warm open working environment where all those concerned could work as a team.

When planning a school newspaper that involves the students, the writer found that using a format for collecting the news was helpful. The format made it easier to use more students as reporters without training new students each month. The format was a framework for writing the news that each new student could follow. The writer recommended that before starting a newspaper teachers develop a format for collecting the news to fit the particular needs of the school.

The homework projects tied in nicely with the newspaper and conformed to the curriculum because the projects were planned cooperatively between teachers. The assignments extended through the weekend to give parents and students time to interact. After the first attempt at making a home/school connection through writing projects, the writer discovered that teachers should go slowly and carry each project to completion without rushing the students. These projects were beneficial in improving the home/school

connection and may even be beneficial without a newspaper if students see written work published in other ways such as class books. As each project was completed, teachers worked collaboratively to design the next writing project to fit into the curriculum theme. Sharing students' writing with other classes also motivated students and parents to work together to publish better stories. Themes for writing were flexible. Sometimes the writing theme continued longer than a month, especially when interest was high. Some parents did not give enough information for a student to write with confidence. In such cases, teachers sent a note home for more information so that every student would have an appealing final product. Information obtained from the less responsive parents was published to encourage greater future participation.

The writer found that communication could be enhanced by utilizing the most valuable resource in schools--the children. Parents read what children wrote, listened when children were praised, responded to invitations by children, and attended childrens' performances. Keeping the focus on children rather than on an adult-centered agenda was the key.

Dissemination

The principal collected several monthly copies of the writer's newspaper and distributed them at a system administrators'

meeting, at the county office, and at a board of education meeting. Needless to say, the principal was proud of the students' work and recognized the writer as being responsible for starting the publication. An announcement about the school newspaper was written in the system-wide school news.

At a county meeting of SIA teachers, the writer introduced the newspaper and homework writing projects. As a result, several teachers were interested in starting a publication.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

PARENT SURVEY

Parent Survey

HOME/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP
Please answer the following questions to help the school improve parent/teacher communication.

1. Have you talked with your child's teacher this year?_____ If so, was the conversation pleasant and informative?_____

2. Have you received a "happy note" or call from your child's teacher this year? yes ___ no___

3. Were you notified only when your child experienced problems at school? yes___ no___

4. Have the school news reports made you feel more involved in your child's school?____ Explain your answer._____

_____

_____

_____

Other Comments:_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX B

PARENT/STUDENT READING CONTRACT

Parent/Student Reading Contract

MY "TMAD" READING CONTRACT
"Twenty-Minutes-A-Day"

I_____would like to be a member of TMAD. I know that reading is important and I want to read the required twenty-minutes-a-day in order to become a member. I will ask an adult to sign my contract with me. This adult will agree to help and encourage me for the next thirty-two weeks to read twenty-minutes-a-day.

My signature_____

Mom, Dad, Grandparent, or Guardian

Signature_____

APPENDIX C

SCHOOL NEWS--TEACHERS

SCHOOL NEWS--TEACHERS

Please answer one or all of the following questions, and student reporters will use the information to write articles for the school paper. Place your information sheet in the designated box in the workroom.

++

What is the funniest or most embarrassing thing that has happened in your classroom?_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Do you remember an experience with a student or parent that really "made your day"? If so, describe it._____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

What other "teacher story" could you share?_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX D

WHAT'S HAPPENING

WHAT'S HAPPENING

To assist students in collecting the news, please jot down what you have been doing in the following categories:

Reading:_____

_____

_____

_____

Language Arts:_____

_____

_____

_____

Math:_____

_____

_____

_____

Science:_____

_____

_____

_____

Social Studies:_____

_____

_____

_____

Guest presenters, field trips, art projects, or other news:_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX E

HOME/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

HOME/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

CLOTHING STYLES

Dear Parent/Guardian:

In language arts I am working on gathering information to use in writing news stories. For this assignment, I am comparing clothing styles of today with those of the past. Please help me complete this activity. The assignment is due:_____.

Sincerely,_____

Family Interview

Find a family member to interview.

Who is it?_____

1. What year were you born?_____

2. What clothing styles were popular when you were my age?_____

_____

_____

3. What do you remember wearing to school?_____

_____

_____

4. What clothing fads were popular during your school days?_____

_____

_____

5. Of any decade of styles, what clothing style did you like best and why? _____

_____

_____

6. What styles did you like least and why?_____

_____

Use the information from your interview to write a story about clothing styles.

Home-to-School Communication

Dear Parent/Guardian: Your comments about your child's work in the activity are important. Please write yes or no for each statement:

_____My child understood the homework and was able to discuss it.

_____My child and I enjoyed this activity.

_____This assignment helps me understand what my child is learning in language arts.

Other comments:

Parent/Guardian signature_____

HOME/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

Dear Parent/Guardian:
We have been discussing our environment and what we can do to play an active part in making our earth endure for many more years. The assignment is for me to critically look at my own neighborhood from the prospective of an environmentalist. Please drive me around the neighborhood to help me answer the following questions:

Signature_____Due date_____

Parent/Guardian who is helping:_____

1. Describe the location of your home._____

_____

_____

2. What environmental changes would you make in your neighborhood?_____

_____

_____

3.What good environmentally related things are happening in your neighborhood?_____

_____

_____

_____

4. What should be done another way to improve the environment?

How?_____

_____

_____

_____

Pretend you are writing an article for the local paper. Use the information you have collected to report the facts (both good and bad). Advocate for changes that should be made.

++

Home-to-School Communication

Dear Parent/Guardian: Your comments about your child's work in the activity are important. Please write yes or no for each statement:

_____My child understood the homework and was able to discuss it.

_____My child and I enjoyed this activity.

_____This assignment helps me understand what my child is learning in language arts.

Other comments:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Parent/Guardian signature_____

HOME/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

FAVORITE RECIPES

Dear Parent/Guardian:
In language arts I am working on using information I gather from others to write explanations. For this assignment, I am trying to learn about the past through your eyes and memory. I hope that you enjoy completing this activity with me. The assignment is due:_____

Student signature_____

Family Interview

Find a family member to interview.
Who is it?_____

Ask:
1. What food from your childhood brings special memories of those days?_____

2. What special memories does it bring to mind?_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3. Will you write the recipe for me?_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

4. Why was this recipe special to you?_____

_____

_____

_____

5. Of what person or thing does it remind you?_____Tell me about this person or thing._____

_____

_____

_____

6. How did you get this recipe?_____

On a separate sheet write a short story about what you learned.

Home-to-School Communication

Dear Parent/Guardian: Your comments about your child's work on this activity are important. Please write yes or no for each statement:

_____My child understood the homework and was able to discuss it.

_____My child and I enjoyed this activity.

_____This assignment helps me understand what my child is learning in language arts.

Other comments:_____

_____

_____

Parent/Guardian signature:_____

HOME/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Dear Parent/Guardian:

In language arts I am trying to refine my writing skills by using topics of special interest to me. What could be more interesting than learning about my earlier days and writing about me! I hope that you enjoy completing this activity with me. The assignment is due_____.

Signature_____(student)

Family Interview

Who is the family member?_____

Ask:

1. Where was I born and when (time of day etc.)?_____

_____

2. What was happening in the world the year or month of my birth?_

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. What was I like as a baby?_____

_____

_____

_____

4. What was the scariest thing that happened when I was very young?_____

_____

_____

5. What was the funniest thing that happened?_____

_____

_____

_____

6. What was my favorite thing to do?_____

_____

_____

_____

7. What was my favorite toy? Tell me about it._____

_____

_____

_____

8. How did I like the idea of starting school? Explain_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Home-to-School Communication

Dear Parent/Guardian: Your comments about your child's work in the activity are important. Please write yes or no for each statement:

_____My child understood the homework and was able to discuss it.

_____My child and I enjoyed this activity.

_____This assignment helps me understand what my child is learning in language arts.

Other comments:_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Parent/Guardian signature_____

HOME/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

TIMES HAVE CHANGED

Dear Parent/Guardian:

In reading and language arts we have been reading stories about pilgrim times. For this assignment I am comparing today's way of living to life styles in pilgrim days. Please listen to my ideas and make some suggestions. This assignment is due:_____

Sincerely,_____(student)

Objective: Write a story comparing life today with life in pilgrim times.

Procedure: Start with a main idea sentence.
Close with a sentence that ties everything together.
To get started list the things you would like to compare.

Pilgrim Times	Today
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

++

Dear Parent: Your comments about your child's work in this activity are important. Please write yes or no for each statement:

_____My child understood the homework and was able to discuss it.

_____My child and I enjoyed this activity.

_____This assignment helps me understand what my child is learning in language arts.

Other comments:_____

_____

Parent/Guardian signature:_____

HOME/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

Favorite Family Stories

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I have been listening to my teacher read the book, Charlotte's Web. Next week we are planning a storytelling event. I want to practice storytelling at home before telling a story in class. Wilbur, in Charlotte's Web, loved to listen to Charlotte tell about her family. Tell me a family story that I can retell in class and help me organize my story. My teacher says that good storytellers practice so they have a clear idea of the story sequence and can use expression. I must write the story for a class book. Assignment due _____

Signature_____(student)

Home-to-School Communication

Dear Parent/Guardian: Your comments about your child's work in the activity are important. Please write yes or no for each statement:

_____My child understood the homework and was able to discuss it.

_____My child and I enjoyed this activity.

_____This assignment helps me understand what my child is learning in language arts.

Other comments: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Parent/Guardian signature_____

HOME/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

FAVORITE THINGS TO DO

Dear Parent/Guardian:

In language arts I am working on using information I gather from others to write directions. For this assignment, I am trying to learn to give directions that other students can follow. I hope that you enjoy completing this activity with me. The assignment is due_____.

Student Signature_____

Family interview

Find a family member to interview.

Who is it?_____

Ask:

1. Is there something you really enjoy doing, making, or playing, etc.? Tell me what it is._____

2. Tell me how to do it or make it._____

_____

_____

_____

3. How did you learn to do this activity?_____

_____

_____

_____

4. Why do you like it so much?_____

_____

_____

Home-to-School Communication

Parent/Guardian: Your comments about your child's work in this activity are important. Please write yes or no for each statement:

____My child understood the homework and was able to discuss it.

____My child and I enjoyed this activity.

____This assignment helps me understand what my child is learning in language arts.

Other comments:_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Parent/Guardian signature_____

HOME/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

FAMILY FITNESS SURVEY

Dear Parent/Guardian:

In language arts I am compiling information to write a report on my family's fitness. Being fit is an important goal for the family and hopefully we will become more aware of ways to get and stay fit. These are some of the ways other people include fitness in their day: bike riding, sledding jumping rope, swimming, jumping jacks, push-ups, sit-ups aerobics, baseball, soccer tennis basketball, raking leaves, or walking a pet. Help me compile a fitness record for the week that I will record on the survey sheet.

Family member helping keep this record:

_____ Due date_____

(name of family member)

Signature_____

(student)

Home-to-School Communication

Dear Parent/Guardian: Your comments about your child's work in the activity are important. Please write yes or no for each statement:

_____My child understood the homework and was able to discuss it.

_____My child and I enjoyed this activity.

_____This assignment helps me understand what my child is learning in language arts.

Other comments:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Parent/Guardian signature_____

FITNESS CHART

Each day for one week, keep track of your family's fitness activities:

1. After the day on line one, write down fitness activities you do alone.
2. On line 2, write the fitness activities someone else in your family does alone.
3. On line 3, write the fitness activities you and at least one other person in your family do together.
4. In each space under 2 and 3, tell who is doing the activity.

When the chart is complete, answer these questions:

How many fitness activities did you list under 1? 2? 3?

What is one way you can turn something you listed under 1 or 2 into an activity the whole family can do together?

Write your answers as a news article with an introduction, body, and closing. Clip your story to this information sheet.

Monday
1._____
2._____
3._____

Tuesday
1._____
2._____
3._____

Wednesday
1._____
2._____
3._____

Thursday
1._____
2._____
3._____

Friday
1._____
2._____
3._____

Saturday
1._____
2._____
3._____

Sunday
1._____
2._____
3._____

APPENDIX F

TEACHER--QUESTIONNAIRE

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer the following questions to help make communication better.

Do you feel the newspaper has made a difference in communication among teachers? If so, how?_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

What suggestions would you make to improve the newspaper?_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Other comments:_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for your time in completing this form. Please return the completed form to the sharing box in the workroom.